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SUBSCRIPTION FORM ON PAGE 2.

THE Hebrew Watchman

SERVING THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1925

HEBREWWATCHMAN.COM 1 SHEVAT, 5784 JANUARY 11, 2024 VOL. 102, NO. 17

Beth Sholom Sisterhood Treats First Responders to a Little Christmas Cheer



Ted Cohen and his son, Jack, at the Fire Station #44 on North Humphreys

Beth Sholom members traveled through parts of Memphis on December 25 to thank first responders for their service, delivering cookies and other treats to police and fire stations. Their reward for this mitzvah? Recipients didn't hesitate to show their appreciation for the sweets and the company. When Beth Sholom member Lisa Shipowitz presented a tray of cookies at Collierville Baptist Hospital, an intake worker cried and hugged her. At several fire stations,

firefighters happily showed child visitors around stations and let them climb onto firetrucks. "Christmas Day visits from Beth Sholom members has been a long-running Sisterhood project that was halted by the pandemic," said Barbara Hellman, who co-chaired this year's delivery program. "We were thrilled we could resume the visits this year. It fills our hearts with joy to see first responders smiling, laughing, and enjoying



Michele Less at #25 Fire Station on William Avenue

themselves on a day when they would otherwise be with their families." Hellman's co-chair, Barbara Rosenfeld Vaccai, added that in these turbulent times, when antisemitism is on the rise, Beth Sholom's visits spread goodwill among Memphians who may not have many interactions or relationships

with Jews. "We were so proud to support our local community workers who do so much for the Memphis," Vaccai explained. "It's a mitzvah to visit and create a connection with them, especially on a day when

(See Treats Page 7)

In Latest Indictment, Sen. Bob Menendez Accused of Receiving Qatari Bribes



Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) and his wife, Nadine Arslanian, leave federal court in New York after pleading not guilty to bribery charges, on Sept. 27, 2023. Credit: Lev Radin/Shutterstock.

By Andrew Bernard

(JNS) – Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) allegedly received wristwatches and racing tickets as bribes from Qatar, according to an indictment released last Tuesday. Menendez, one of Israel's strongest supporters in Congress, was first charged with bribery and extortion counts in September when federal prosecutors alleged that he received cash, gold bars and a Mercedes convertible in exchange for assisting the Egyptian government and a group of businessmen involved in a New Jersey-based halal meat-inspection company.

Last Tuesday's indictment, which re-

places the prior one, is the first indication that the former Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman may have also received payoffs from Qatar. Qatar and Egypt have been regional rivals for the past decade, but their relations have warmed following the restoration of ties between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 2021. Fred Daibes is a New Jersey-based real estate developer and one of five co-defendants in the case, all of whom have pleaded not guilty. "Robert Menendez and Fred Daibes,

(See Menendez Page 7)

We Stand with Israel.

There is still so much to be done to help the Israeli people, and Federation is here to help shine a light, provide resources and foster hope. Donate using the QR code. You can also send a message to our brothers and sisters in Shoham, our Israeli sister city by emailing shoham@jcpmemphis.org, and visit our office to pick up campaign yard signs, yahrzeit candles, We Stand with Israel bracelets, and blue ribbons.

My Teen Israel Experience



Calla Coonin and Ava Halpert in Old City, Jerusalem on Tisha B'av

By Calla Coonin

This past summer, with the help of the Lemsy Endowment Fund, I enrolled in a summer high school program with Alexander Muss High School in Israel. It was unlike anything I've ever experienced before. I learned about the amazing country of Israel while making long-lasting friendships.

I swam to the lowest point on Earth, the Dead Sea, and climbed to the heights of the mountain Masada. Our teachers guided us through the history of the Jewish people as we stood in the same places as our ancestors. I crawled through the same caves and swam in the same water as the Jewish people did in the Tanach.

My program started in the underground water cistern of Tel Gezer where we learned about the Canaanites, the first people in the land of Israel after the Exodus. We then went to Tel Azeka to learn about the famous fight between David and Goliath and visited the City of David to walk through Hezekiah's water tunnel, which saved the Jewish people.

We woke up early to have an exhausting climb up Masada and then witnessed a beautiful sunrise, had morning services, and learned about the massacre that happened there. While learning about more battles in the Midras Caves and Belvoir, we also learned about how Judaism changed when we visited Tzfat and studied the Kabbalistic renaissance. We studied how Israel became the country it is today, starting with the First

Aliyah to Mazkeret Batya. We swam in the Nitzanim Beach where Jews made illegal aliyah, desperate to reach their homeland.

As amazing as the sites and stories were, the trip was truly made special because of the people I met. Our campus was in Be'er Sheva, and I lived with 40 other students my age. I was truly lucky because I got amazing roommates whom I grew close to and got along with because we were all thankfully early sleepers.

But for every overnight trip when we slept in hostels, we were randomly placed with other girls allowing us to truly grow closer to everyone there. We also had the most amazing teachers. They were truly engaging and made the learning fun, and our madrichim (counselors) held us together. They went above and beyond for every student there, ensuring that we were taken care of, despite the trouble we put them through.

In particular, there were specific moments from the trip that truly stuck out to me as meaningful. The first is when we went stargazing in the Negev desert. It was cold in the desert, so we all snuggled up together and laid on mattresses in the middle of nowhere as we learned about constellations and how our ancestors navigated the desert. We looked through telescopes to see the stars and had a campfire where we roasted marshmallows and drank tea. This night was one of the best bonding moments in the trip and I grew closer to everyone I was with.

Another special memory is going to the Kotel (the Western Wall) on Shabbat. After our phones were put aside, we walked through the Old City to the Wall, and we were met with crowds of people. This was a night filled with singing and dancing with random strangers bonding through Judaism.

Being able to sing songs with strangers from a different country who speak a different language gave me a deep feeling of connection. I was invited to pray with others, and it felt like the hundreds of people who were there that night were my family. This feeling was what I felt throughout my whole trip. I found a new family. Not only with the people in my program, but with the country of Israel.

Thank you to Federation and the Lemsky Fund for helping me have the trip of a lifetime.

Calla Coonin, daughter of Anna and Victor Coonin, is a senior at White Station High School. Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsy Endowment Fund

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1/11/2024



Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Jan. 12, 2024 / 2 Shevat, 5784..... 4:50 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. Jan. 13, 2024 / 3 Shevat, 5784..... 5:49 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Va'eira

provided her with a Teen Israel Experience grant to offset the costs of her Alexander Muss High School in Israel program.

All rising juniors and seniors are eligible for grants of up to \$3,000 to attend a recognized teen summer or semester program in Israel. Teen Israel Experience applications for Summer 2024 are open – visit jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund. **HW**

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The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

Lunch is Monday–Friday at 11:30 a.m. All programs start at 12:15 p.m.
Monthly Luncheon is at noon.



On Wednesday January 17 at noon, we will have our big **MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Monthly Luncheon** featuring Julianne Thomas & Dom Fosco – Vocals, Piano, and Sax. Julianne and Dom have been making music all of their lives. They each have many accomplishments in their long careers, but along the way, the best reward is the love of sharing what they do. Julianne offers a stirring vocal style with a joyful presence while Dom is an amazing instrumentalist on keyboard, sax and

backgrounds. Their repertoire includes traditional jazz, standards, blues, and R&B. Everyone will sing and smile, swoon over the tunes, and tap their toes while Julianne and Dom create a journey back in time that is “Unforgettable.” Come enjoy this terrific Duo and enjoy a good kosher lunch all for \$5. The luncheon and Julianne with Dom start at noon on the 17th. Reservations can be made by calling the front desk at 901.761.0810 or emailing Steve Kaplan at stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org. **HW**

Classes Restarting at the MJCC

January 15, 2024, at 12 p.m.
Declutter 1-2-3 featuring Stacy Saed
Whether it is a move to a new location, a scale down to a senior living community or reviving an existing home, Stacy Saed has you covered. Learn tips on how to declutter your own environment. Reservations are required as space is limited. Come join us for Lunch at 11:30 a.m. or just for the program at 12 p.m. Stacy gave this talk in October and was asked to come back for one of our luncheon programs. Everyone left with great information. There is no charge. Call the front desk at the MJCC 901-761-0810 to register.



Stacy Saed

January 25 through February 22, Thursdays at 10 a.m. -12 p.m.
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Daily Lunch
Please join us Monday through Friday for a delicious kosher lunch from the Kitchens at the Memphis Jewish Home. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required the day before by 1 p.m. by contacting Adult Services Coordinator Steve Kaplan at 901-259-9220 or stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org or by calling the front desk at 901-761-0810. **HW**

Chabad to Host Café Chabad with Inspirational Author

Chabad of Tennessee is set to host an inspiring evening featuring acclaimed author and speaker Rabbi Gershon Schusterman on Saturday night, January 20, 2024. Rabbi Gershon Schusterman knew all the textbook answers when comforting bereaved community members who asked him, “Where is God? If God is loving, how could this happen?” But when the rabbi’s young wife died

suddenly, leaving him a 38-year-old widower with 11 children to raise, he found himself reeling. His quest for answers to these timeless questions led him to a deeper exploration of Judaism’s teachings about how to cope with and transcend tragedy, teachings that have provided comfort and understanding to millions of people throughout the generations. Rabbi Schusterman will delve into his acclaimed book, “Why God Why: How to Believe in Heaven When It Hurts Like Hell.” The book you need to have and hope you’ll never need.

The event, scheduled to take place at Chabad, promises an engaging discourse and an enriching experience for all attendees. The highlight of the evening will be the Cafe Chabad dinner, boasting a delectable spread featuring New York smoked fish, freshly baked bagels, assorted soups, salads, and an array of culinary delights. This promises to be an evening of enlightenment, delectable cuisine, and soulful conversation –an opportunity not to be missed for those seeking spiritual nourishment and a taste of New York’s finest flavors. Join Rabbi Gershon Schusterman and the Chabad community for a night destined to uplift the spirit and inspire the mind.

To secure a spot at this extraordinary event, RSVPs are required no later than Wednesday, January 17. Reserve your place at www.jewishmemphis.com/cafe. For further information and inquiries, feel free to contact Chabad at 901-754-0404. **HW**

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Report: Hezbollah Withdraws 1-2 Miles from Israel’s Northern Border



IDF artillery near the border with Lebanon, Jan. 4, 2024. Credit: Ayal Margolin/Flash90.

(JNS) – Hezbollah has withdrawn its forces 2 to 3 kilometers (1.24 to 1.86 miles) from the Israeli border, “The Economist” reported last Thursday.

The retreat is described as a “tactical withdrawal” and a signal to the United States and Israel that the Iranian terrorist proxy wants to avoid an all-out war.

Gallant: Time running out for diplomacy

It will soon be too late to find a peace-

ful solution for Hezbollah’s attacks from across the Lebanese border, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant told U.S. presidential adviser Amos Hochstein last Thursday.

During the two men’s meeting at the Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv, Gallant conveyed the message that “There is only one possible result – a new reality in the northern arena, which will enable the secure return of our citizens. Yet we find ourselves at a junction – there is a short window of time for diplomatic understandings, which we prefer. We will not tolerate the threats posed by the Iranian proxy Hezbollah and we will ensure the security of our citizens.”

Gallant emphasized that Israel’s top priority is changing the security situation at the border to enable the return of over 80,000 internally displaced Israelis to their homes.

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Herzog and senior defense officials joined the briefing.

IAF attacks Hezbollah targets in Lebanon

An Israeli Air Force fighter jet struck a Hezbollah observation post and terrorist infrastructure in the Maroun El Ras area of Southern Lebanon last Thursday following several launches towards Israel from the location, the IDF said.

A short while later, the IDF attacked an anti-tank squad that was operating in the same area, located adjacent to the border.

Last Monday morning, an Israeli jet struck a Hezbollah terrorist cell attempting to launch drones from a civilian area of Maroun El Ras. The UAVs were destroyed.

“This is another example of Hezbollah’s use of civilian areas for its terrorist activity and its violations of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701,” the IDF said.

Overnight last Wednesday, IDF troops in the Eastern Galilee fired mortar shells to remove a threat at Rab El Thalathine along the Lebanese border.

Last Thursday morning, Hezbollah fired several projectiles at northern Israel, close to Moshav Shtula, the Bedouin village of Arab al-Aramshe, Kibbutz Manara and the town of Metula. No injuries were reported from those attacks.

Hezbollah warned al-Arouri before assassination

The Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese newspaper “Al Akhbar” reported that the Iran-backed terrorist army told Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri that Israel was “following his every move” days before he was assassinated.

Al-Arouri was killed in Beirut last Tuesday night. Israel has not publicly taken responsibility for the assassination. However, al-Arouri was one of the top Hamas leaders on Israel’s target list following the terrorist group’s Oct. 7 massacre.

Six other Hamas operatives, including

two senior officials, were killed in the attack, and five others were wounded. The explosions rocked the Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh, a Hezbollah stronghold.

According to the “Al Akhbar” report, it is unclear whether a fighter jet or a drone carried out the hit. Before the attack, radar had detected the presence of jets over the Mediterranean Sea and drones over Beirut and Dahiyeh.

Several missiles were reportedly launched and two of them succeeded in penetrating two ceilings before reaching the Hamas office and killing the terrorists. The precision missiles were small.

Lebanese PM condemns killing of terror leader

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati called the assassination of the Hamas terrorist leader a “new Israeli crime” shortly after the attack last Tuesday night.

Last Thursday, Mikati welcomed UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) commander Maj. Gen. Araldo Lázaro Sáenz at the Grand Serail, the prime minister’s headquarters in downtown Beirut.

During the meeting, Mikati reiterated his condemnation of Israeli attacks in Lebanon. The two men discussed U.N. Security Resolution Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 Second Lebanon War and demands that Hezbollah be disarmed and not venture south of the Litani River, some 18 miles north of the Israeli border.

“Mikati condemned Israeli aggressions against Lebanon and reiterated Lebanon’s steadfast commitment to Resolution 1701. He called for raising the issue at the United Nations to reject Israeli violations, emphasizing the need to neutralize UNIFIL from military operations for it to fulfill its role effectively,” the Lebanese Kataeb Party’s official news site stated. **HW**

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By Ted Roberts

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Banned SJP Chapters at Two Florida Universities Sue Schools, State Officials

By David Swindle

(JNS) – The Students for Justice in Palestine chapters at the University of Florida and the University of South Florida have taken legal action in response to an order issued by state Gov. Ron DeSantis to shutter them.

Claiming the decision breached their First Amendment rights, the chapters’ suit states that “the deactivation order advances unsubstantiated claims that Florida’s SJP chapters have violated the state’s material support for terrorism statute” and that “governors cannot shut down lawful and peaceful student groups because of the views they express. The First Amendment forbids it.”

A spokesperson for DeSantis disagreed.

“Groups that claim to be part of a foreign terrorist movement have no place on our university campuses,” Julia Friedland, deputy press secretary for DeSantis, told JNS. “The governor was right to disband a group that provides material support to a terrorist organization.”

Jacob Baime, CEO of the Israel on Campus Coalition, supported the decision to ban SJP and said the group’s response to the Oct. 7 terror attacks “reveals a violent, genocidal ideology spreading on campus.”

He called on schools to “act decisively to protect all students. SJP chapters openly supporting Hamas’s attacks cross the line from free speech to incitement and endorsing terrorism.” **HW**

Dr. Matthew Breit Dr. John C. Swearingen


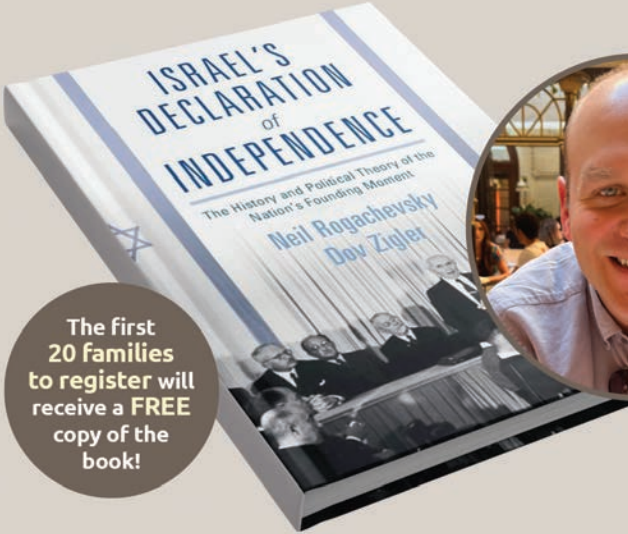
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The first 20 families to register will receive a **FREE** copy of the book!



“The History and Influence of Israel’s Declaration of Independence” at the MJCC Tuesday, January 23 at 7 p.m.

Before October 7, many in Israel and around the world were focused on the proposed judicial reforms. Fierce debates and weekly protests were tearing the country apart. Underlying the arguments was the question: What is the nature of the Jewish state? In order to speak with an authentic voice, many looked back to the nation’s founding documents for inspiration. As one prominent politician put it: “We are fighting over the values of the Declaration of Independence.”

In response to the moment, Tel Aviv’s mayor hung an enormous copy of the Declaration that covered an entire side of City Hall. Others participated in quasi-ritual activities that involved public readings and signings of the Declaration, as citizens of Israel reaffirmed for themselves what they believed to be the founding principles of the State.

But what is included in Israel’s Declaration and perhaps more importantly, what is left out? Did you know there were four different drafts written by four different authors in less than a month?

Have you heard of the first draft’s author (little-known 33-year-old lawyer Mordechai Beham) who, while contemplating his monumental assignment during the Passover holiday, walked over to his neighbor, an American rabbi who had made aliyah some years earlier,

to consult with him as how to write the Declaration? Or were you aware of David Ben-Gurion’s last and final draft of the Declaration that he wrote only hours before he was scheduled to read it publicly? What about the contentious debate as to whether God’s name should appear in the Declaration?

While the history behind the drafting of the Declaration is not well known, the text itself occupies a place of supreme importance in Israeli society. Israel does not have a constitution, so it is the legacy of the State’s Declaration of Independence that continues to influence debates in the public square. What are the ideas present in this Declaration, what do they mean for a Jewish State, and how might they be of importance in the years to come?

Join us at the JCC, Tuesday, January 23 at 7 p.m. for a lecture from Neil Rogachevsky, the Clinical Assistant Professor and Associate Director at the Straus Center of Yeshiva University, and co-author of “Israel’s Declaration of Independence: The History and Political Theory of the Nation’s Founding Moment” (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

The first 20 families to register will receive a free copy of the book. Register at www.jccmemphis.org/JewishLife or by calling the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810. [HW](#)

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Alanis Morissette on Finding Her Jewish Roots, Fates of Family in Holocaust



Alanis Morissette. Credit: Justin Higuchi via Wikimedia Commons.

(JNS) – The musician who rose to prominence in the 1990s with her multiple hits, including “You Oughta Know,” has now learned the truth about her extended family.

Alanis Morissette appeared on the PBS show “Finding Your Roots,” in which researchers and genealogists discover information about celebrities they ought to know.

Morissette had learned in her 20s about her mother’s Jewish background

“I had no idea how super-Jewish I am,” the acclaimed singer said on the “PBS” program hosted by historian Henry Louis Gates.

but said it was not until now that she learned the extent of her Jewish family. The rationalization? Her mother and grandmother mentioned that “there was a terror that was in their bones, and they were being protective of us and not wanting antisemitism. They were protecting us, keeping us in the dark around it.”

Through the program, Morissette learned that her two great-uncles – Gyorgy and Sandor Feuerstein – had disappeared during the Holocaust. The show’s researchers believed that they died as part of an army sent to Russia. Imre Feuerstein, her maternal grandfather, escaped and fled to America in 1956 after the Soviet Union had taken control of Hungary. Imre died in a car accident three months after Morissette’s birth.

The singer said she “always had a crush on” the Jewish community.

“I would just show up on Passover and at seder,” she noted. “Now I know why. It was like, come home.” **HW**

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U.S.-Based Volunteers Helping to Equip IDF Fighters



Volunteers in Newark, New Jersey, shipping gear to Israel. Photo: Courtesy of Operation Israel.

By Amelie Botbol

(JNS) – Operation Israel, a U.S.-based nonprofit, has provided more than \$7 million worth of supplies, medical equipment and protective gear to IDF soldiers since Hamas launched the current war with its massacre of 1,200 people on Oct. 7, the NGO said last Thursday.

Since then, the organization has received requests from nearly a thousand IDF units and provided some 10,000 soldiers with a total of more than 50,000 items, including ceramic vests, ballistic goggles and tactical gear together weighing over 66,000 pounds (30,000 kilograms).

The group works with IDF representatives to facilitate direct requests from combat units and then orders are placed through vetted suppliers.

“I was devastated in a way that I had never been, although I’ve seen a lot. I needed to do something productive that would keep me from sinking,” Adi Vaxman, president of Operation Israel, told JNS.

“I received calls from friends who were drafted or volunteered to serve the country asking for equipment. I immediately took action. I knew what decisions needed to be made and how to fund-raise,” Vaxman, who worked as a paramedic during the First Intifada and helped victims of 9/11, added.

Operation Israel, which collects most of its donations from the United States and Europe, works directly with IDF commanders on the ground to identify the needs of soldiers. It then purchases the gear, ships it and coordinates delivery.

“What sets us apart from makeshift organizations is that we found out all the regulations and all the customs [requirements] ahead of time. It changes every five minutes, but we are ahead of the game,” Vaxman said.

“Our deliveries were delayed on maybe three occasions since we started, but only because of changes in bureaucracy once the gear was already on the plane,” she added.

Operation Israel will continue to buy and ship gear for as long as soldiers actively engage in combat on the frontlines.

“At the beginning, we had about 100 volunteers working around the clock. We still have 40 to 50 volunteers active on a daily basis,” Vaxman said.

As talk of shifting to lower-intensity fighting emerges, Vaxman says her organization will expand its activities to help wounded soldiers recover and to readjust to civilian life.

“Several soldiers who were in touch with us were killed in action, which is very difficult because we formed a relationship with them. The next day we call, they don’t answer, and we see their names in the news,” Vaxman said.

“Others were severely injured. We stay in touch and address needs such as accessible housing, mental health and support in adjusting to life after the war. One minute they’re on the frontlines, and the next they are isolated at a hospital – it’s not easy,” she said.

Vaxman said it was extremely gratifying to see some of the wounded start volunteering with Operation Israel to help others in need even as they are undergoing rehabilitation themselves. **HW**



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Treats...
(Continued From Page 1)



Marcia Menuskin and grandson Dylan Steinberg and Beverly Kay and granddaughter Lyla Kay on South Mendenhall

they are not with their families because they’re spending their holiday serving.”
In addition to Hellman and Vaccai, other Beth Sholom members spreading cheer were Francine Brown, Ted and Jack Cohen, Sharon Finkelstein,



Barbara Hellman at Fire Station #18 on Southern Avenue

Madelyn and Kent Gordon, Mark and Ellen Grishman and their children, Beverly and her granddaughter, Lyla Kay, Michele Less, Mindy Lipson, the Maday Family, Marcia Menuskin and her grandson, Dylan Steinberg, David Ross and his daughter, Julie Ross, Sara Slovis and Susan Stein. **HW**

Menendez...
(Continued From Page 1)

the defendants, attended a private event in Manhattan hosted by the Qatari government,” according to the indictment.
“Several days later, on or about Sept. 27, 2021, Daibes sent Menendez, via an encrypted messaging application, photographs of a computer monitor depicting luxury wristwatches with prices ranging from \$9,990 to \$23,990, and asked Menendez, ‘How about one of these,’” it added.
The indictment alleges that Menendez helped broker Qatar’s multimillion-dollar investment in Daibes’s real estate investments and that in his role as committee chairman, he helped pass a 2021 Senate resolution supporting the Gulf state.
In exchange, a “close relative” of Mendenez’s wife, Nadine, who has also been charged in the scheme, allegedly received several tickets to the Formula One Grand Prix in Miami.

“On or about Jan. 4, 2022, in advance of a planned trip by Fred Daibes, the defendant, to meet with the Qatari investor in London, Robert Menendez, the defendant, used an encrypted messaging application to text the Qatari Investor and Daibes, ‘Greetings. I understand my friend is going to visit with you on the 15th of the month. I hope that this will result in the favorable and mutually beneficial agreement that you have been both engaged in discussing,’” per the indictment.
Also per the indictment, “On or about March 31, 2022, i.e., the day of the sale by Nadine Menendez, a/k/a Nadine Arslanian, the defendant, of gold bars described in paragraph 53.”

“Robert Menendez and Fred Daibes, the defendants, met for dinner,” it added. “That evening, Nadine Menendez texted Menendez, ‘Is it just you, Fred and the Qataris in the private room this entire time?’ and Menendez replied in the affirmative.”
Qatar, which is a U.S.-designated “major non-NATO ally,” and its relationship with the United States have been under increased scrutiny from U.S. lawmakers since Hamas’s Oct. 7 attack on Israel about the Gulf state hosting the terror organization’s political leadership in Doha.
Menendez’s lawyer, Adam Fee, denied the allegations in a statement last

“The government’s new allegations stink of desperation,” said the lawyer for the longtime New Jersey legislator.

Tuesday.
“The government’s new allegations stink of desperation,” Fee said. “Despite what they’ve touted in press releases, the government does not have the proof to back up any of the old or new allegations against Senator Menendez. What they have instead is a string of baseless assumptions and bizarre conjectures based on routine, lawful contacts between a senator and his constituents or foreign officials.”
“At all times, Senator Menendez acted entirely appropriately with respect to Qatar, Egypt and the many other countries he routinely interacts with,” he added. **HW**



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Bond Yields Are Up, but What Are the Risks?

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors
Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com • fa.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael-stein

After years of low yields, bonds are offering higher yields that may be appealing to investors regardless of their risk tolerance. While bonds could play a role in any portfolio, they can be a mainstay for retirees looking for stability and income, and near-retirees might consider shifting some assets into bonds in preparation for retirement.

Bonds are generally considered to have lower risk than stocks – one good reason to own them –but they are not without risk. In fact, bonds are subject to multiple risks. In considering the brief explanations below, keep in mind that coupon rate refers to the interest paid on the face value of a bond, whereas yield refers to the return to the investor based on the purchase price. A bond purchased for less than face value will have a higher yield than the coupon rate, and a bond purchased for more than face value will have a lower yield than the coupon rate.

Interest rate risk (or market risk) – the risk that interest rates will rise, making the coupon rate on an existing bond less appealing because new bonds offer higher rates. This typically lowers the value of a bond on the secondary market, but it would not change the yield for a bond purchased at issue and held to maturity. As the Federal Reserve has rapidly raised rates to combat inflation, the potential resale value of existing

bonds has plummeted. However, rates may be nearing a peak, which potentially could make it a more opportune time to purchase bonds. If interest rates drop, the value of a bond will typically increase.

Duration risk – the risk that longer-term bonds will be more sensitive to changes in interest rates. Duration is stated in years and based on the bond’s maturity date as well as other factors. A 1% increase in interest rates typically will decrease a bond’s value on the secondary market by 1% for each year of duration. For example, a bond with a duration of seven years can be expected to lose 7% of its value on the secondary market.

Opportunity risk (or holding period risk) – the risk that you will not be able to take advantage of a potentially better investment. The longer the term of a bond, the greater the risk that a more attractive investment might arise or other events might negatively impact your bond investment.

Inflation risk – the risk that the yield on a bond will not keep up with the rate of inflation. This might be of special concern in the current environment, but high inflation is the reason that the Fed has been raising interest rates. If inflation cools, bonds with today’s higher yields could outpace inflation going forward.

By the Letters
Bond ratings in descending order of creditworthiness as judged by the three best-known rating agencies (shaded ratings are considered non-investment grade)

Standard & Poor's	Moody's	Fitch
AAA	Aaa	AAA
AA+/-	Aa1-3	AA+/-
A+/-	A1-3	A+/-
BBB+/-	Baa1-3	BBB+/-
BB+/-	Ba1-3	BB+/-
B+/-	B1-3	B+/-
CCC+/-	Caa1-3	CCC+/-
CC/C	Ca	CC/C
D	C	RD/D

Note: Standard & Poor’s and Fitch Ratings use the symbols + and – to denote the upper and lower ranges of ratings from AA to CCC; Moody’s uses the numbers 1, 2, and 3 to denote the upper, middle, and lower ranges from Aa to Caa.

Call risk – the risk that an issuer will redeem the bond when interest rates are falling in order to issue new bonds at lower rates. Investors can avoid this risk by purchasing non-callable bonds.

Credit risk (or risk of default) – the risk that the bond issuer is unable to make promised interest payments and/or return principal upon maturity. Credit-rating agencies analyze this risk and issue ratings that reflect their assessment. Higher-rated bonds are considered “investment grade.” Lower-rated bonds, commonly called “junk bonds,” are non-investment grade. They generally offer higher yields and are considered speculative with higher credit risks.

Some lower-rated bonds may be insured, so the bond carries two ratings, one for the bond and one for the insurance company. Bond insurance adds a potential layer of protection if an issuer defaults, but it is only as good as the insurer’s credit quality and ability to pay. An investor should not buy bonds based solely on the insurance.

The principal value of bonds may fluctuate with market conditions. Bonds redeemed prior to maturity may be worth more or less than their original cost. Investments seeking to achieve higher yields also involve a higher degree of risk.

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OBITUARIES

Harriet “Penny” Bloomfield

Harriet “Penny” Bloomfield, 93, died Friday, December 29, 2023. Harriet was born to Isidor and Dora Wald on September 8, 1930, in Bronx, N.Y. She was a resident of Memphis for 47 years.

She was a homemaker, wife, mother, grandma, and great-grandma.

In addition, she volunteered her time by making crocheted blankets for the residents at Plough Towers. She enjoyed playing Mah Jong with her friends along with schmoozing with the ladies of the local Memphis model railroad club.

She is survived by her sons, Steven (Brenda), Larry (Karen), and Dennis (Jenny), her grandchildren, Stuart, Shari (Jacob), Brian, Claire, Kyle (Cristin), Sam, Max and Hallie, and her great-grandchildren, Abigail, Noah, and Dalton.

Services and burial were held on Wednesday, January 3, 2024, at Memorial Park Cemetery.

The family would like to thank the Baptist Reynolds Hospice House for her final days of care. **HW**

Matthew (Matt) D. Curland

Matthew (Matt) D. Curland, age 88, passed away on Saturday, December 30 at NHC in Somerville, Tennessee.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Lucille Evensky, father Joe Curland, brother Marvin Curland, mother-in-law Mary Haire, and the love of his life, Elizabeth (Liz) Curland, his wife of 55 years. They met at Southside High School and had an on and off relationship until they realized that they just could not live without each other and got married on September 1, 1957.

Matt was born in February of 1935 in Memphis, Tennessee, where he lived most of his life. He attended and played football for Southside High School and then pursued his undergraduate degree at both Southwestern and Memphis State. While he was in college, he was drafted to the Army and was stationed in Friedberg, Germany. Liz joined him overseas, and they had their first of four children.

After serving our country, Matt came back to Memphis and balanced being a husband, a father, a student and an employee. He attended University of Tennessee Pharmacy School and graduated in June of 1964, in fact, it was the same day that his third son was born. For over 50 years, Matt worked as a pharmacist and store manager at such places as Walgreens, Super X, Centerville Pharmacy (his own pharmacy) and Super D. For anyone that knew Matt, they would know that the best part of him being a pharmacist was getting to talk to so many people and building relationships with his customers. Matt never knew a stranger. Although his children got embarrassed, he loved to initiate conversations with anyone he encountered, whether they liked it or not.

Matt is survived by his three sons, Nathan (Jeannie) of Lexington, Tenn., Mark (Brenda) of Cordova, Tenn., and Michael (Beverly) of Oakland, Tenn.; his daughter, Felicia, (Dave) of Roswell, Ga.; his grandchildren, Lucille, Joshua, Hunter, Stephanie, Jessica, Austin, Danielle, Bobby, Keira, and Kennedy; and his 12 great-grandchildren.

The funeral service was held on Tuesday, January 2 at Temple Israel’s cemetery in Memphis, Tenn.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations in his memory be made to the ALS foundation or St. Jude. **HW**

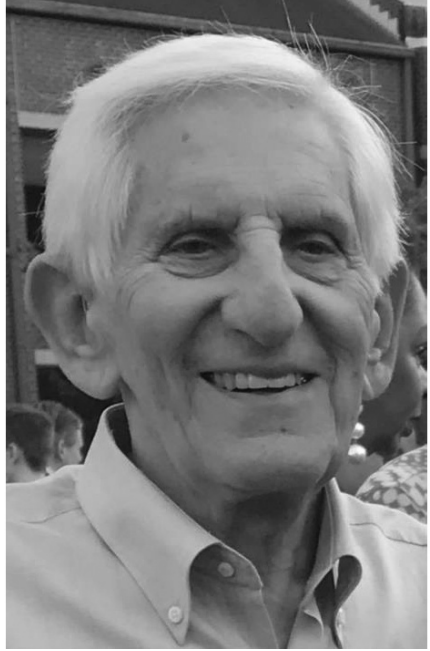
Hilda Fleischhacker, 92, of Canton, Mass., formerly of Memphis, Tenn., passed away on December 26, 2023. She was born January 25, 1931, in Ep-pingen, Germany, to Arthur and Bertha (Weingartner) Frank. At the age of 6 her family fled Germany and lived for a few months with cousins in Michigan before settling in Chicago, Illinois.

She married the late Walter Fleis-chhacker in 1954, and they enjoyed 68 years of marriage until his pass-ing in 2022. They moved to Memphis in 1963. Mrs. Fleischhacker served as a secretary for Beth Sholom Syn-agogue in Memphis, and later for the Paul Revere Insurance Company. She leaves three children, Michael of Silver Spring, Md., Deborah Wayler (Barry) of Walpole, Mass., and David (Chany) of

Geraldine Friedman Haspel, “Gerry,” passed away peacefully Tuesday, De-cember 26 at the age of 102. She lived a long, full life, surrounded by the love and devotion of her children and grand-children who called her “Nana.”

Gerry was born in St. Louis where she met her beloved husband, Sam M. Haspel, Jr., who was a student from Memphis. A very long love story fol-lowed that continued uninterrupted af-ter Sam’s death in 2002. Gerry and Sam were lifelong congregants of Temple Is-rael, where he served as president of the congregation and she as president of the Temple Sisterhood.

Traveling extensively, Gerry and Sam saw much of the world, always return-ing with new friends they made on their trips with whom Gerry continued corre-



Irvin Lee Serenco

Irvin Lee Serenco, 88, passed away December 12, 2023, at his home sur-rounded by love and his adoring family. He is survived by his three children, Alli-son Serenco Parker (Keith) of Memphis, Gail Serenco (Joel Kravetz) of Arling-ton, Va., and Michael Serenco (Cheryn) of Las Vegas, Nev. He also parts from his seven grandchildren, Grant Parker of New York City, N.Y., Miles Parker of Chicago, Ill., Reese Parker of Mem-

Hilda Fleischhacker

Beit Shemesh, Israel, and three grand-children, Leah, Menachem and Yehudit Fleischhacker. She is also survived by her loving brother, Werner Frank, of Thousand Oaks, Ca.

In addition to her professional life, Mrs. Fleischhacker enjoyed sewing, needlepoint, mahjong and baking. Her grandchildren were the main beneficia-ries of her talents, as she often sewed her granddaughters’ dresses and baked for their bar and bat mitzvah kiddush-es. She was an active member of Bar-on Hirsch Congregation for the last 50 years and an active volunteer. Hilda and Walter were honored with the congre-gation’s Member of the Year Award in 2008.

After retiring, Hilda and Walter en-joyed travelling, including several trips

Geraldine Friedman Haspel

spondence for years thereafter.

Possessed of a terrific sense of humor, her laughter was contagious and a de-light to her family. Her wit lasted until her last day. Gerry made friends easily as evidenced by the many loyal friend-ships that endured throughout most of her life. She loved her weekly Mahjong games, and the family poker games around the dining room table were hi-larious. Gerry was also the owner and operator of a unique gift shop, Haspel’s Gift Originals, while her husband kept an office in the basement. Gerry and Sam enjoyed a life filled with love and laughter. As well as her husband, Gerry was predeceased by her beloved daugh-ter, Susan H. Sanford.

Gerry is survived by her brother, Gene S. Friedman (Karen), and her

phs, Jake Parker of Memphis, Jordan Kravetz of Arlington, Va., and Bree and Sage Serenco of Las Vegas, Nev.

He is preceded in death by his loving wife, Deanna Serenco, parents Gertrude and Abe Serenco, and sister Charlotte Levitch.

Irvin was born in Paris, Tennessee, and was a long-lived resident of Mem-phs. He graduated from Georgia In-stitute of Technology where he played football throughout his college years. After college he pursued his job of five decades at Wurzburg Brothers.

Irvin served as an avid member of the Memphis Jewish Community Cen-ter and held the role of president in his highest esteem. Irvin and his wife estab-lished the Deanna and Irvin Serenco In-fant Care Center in the MJCC preschool in efforts to ensure that early childhood students receive annual speech, lan-guage, and hearing screenings free of charge. The infrared hearing system in the MJCC’s newly renovated theater was provided in honor of Deanna. He also made sure the funds were available for seniors to participate in the JCC’s senior lunch program. Irvin was also an active member of Beth Sholom Synagogue and provided a room-sized Talis to the con-gregation of Baron Hirsch Synagogue.

Irvin stood for what a true father, grand-

to Israel and returning to see their child-hood homes in Germany and Switzer-land. They also spent much of their time doing volunteer work at Baron Hirsch, the Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab and the Pink Palace.

Most of all, Hilda loved her family, and was always there to support and as-sist them. She looked forward to each of their visits and enjoyed taking trips to visit them.

Funeral Services were held on De-cember 29 in the Sam Abraham Chapel with burial at the Baron Hirsch Cem-etery. Rabbi Ian Lichter and Cantor Ricky Kampf officiated at the service. The family is grateful for any donations to go to Baron Hirsch Congregation or Friends of the IDF (fidf.org). **HW**

son, Randolph “Randy” Haspel (Melo-dy), his stepchildren and their families. She is also survived by her two devoted granddaughters, Julie, who looked after her every need, Jill Sanford Burrows (Aaron), and their children, Poppy and Elsie, and her extended family of cous-ins, nieces and nephews.

The family would like to express their gratitude to Gerry’s caregivers, Lisa Wakefield, Sallie Ford and Everlena Gray, who attended her with kindness and love in her later years. Private, fam-ily graveside services were held where Gerry took her place next to her beloved Sam and her daughter, Susan.

In lieu of flowers, the family would appreciate donations in her name to one of her favorite charities, the Memphis Food Bank. **HW**

father, husband, friend, and confidant should be, and demonstrated these quali-ties in his everyday life. He took pleasure in woodcraft by building sculptures for his family, including gumball machines, bowling alleys, and even barstools. Irvin enjoyed walks on the Greenline and pic-nics at Shelby Farms Park where he could watch the various types of people go by. He cherished his Saturday morning walks with his daughter, Allison, that became a weekly tradition for years on end. He took pride in his family and the accom-plishments each person acquired, ranging from first steps to moving abroad. Irvin shared an immeasurable bond with his wife, Deanna, with a marriage flourishing over 60 years.

Together they built a lineage of inspi-ration and true foundations within the community and home life that lives on in the hearts of everyone Irvin touched. Irvin Serenco will be remembered as the wholly selfless, fervently passionate, and actively devoted man he was with memories that will continue to persist even in separation.

The funeral was held at Beth Sholom Memorial Gardens on Sunday, Decem-ber 17. The family requests donations to be made to the Memphis Jewish Com-munity Center or a charity of the do-nor’s choice. **HW**

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Ontario Jewish Community Hoping to Grow Runs Afoul of Israeli Envoy



Dan Brotman, executive director of the Windsor Jewish Federation and Community Centre in Ontario, Canada. Credit: Courtesy.

By Dave Gordon

(JNS) – Thanks to a new Canadian law, Israelis and Palestinians who are already in Canada or are certain close relatives of Canadian citizens living in the country are eligible for fee-exempt, three-year study or work permits.

“The scale of this humanitarian crisis is devastating, and the situation on the ground is challenging. Israelis and Palestinians in Canada will continue to find safety here, and we will do what we can to help loved ones who have fled the region, as well as eligible family members who remain in Gaza,” stated Marc Miller, Canadian minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship.

“We will continue to remain flexible with our response so we can meet the unique needs of those who require our support,” he added.

Dan Brotman, the executive director of the Windsor Jewish Federation and Community Centre in Ontario, Canada

(near Detroit), told JNS that the development solidified many Israelis’ existing plans to resettle in Canada.

Brotman saw this working with his community’s J Welcome Home project, which helps Jews relocate to Windsor, where its Jewish population of 1,500 hopes to increase.

The program offers free consultation, helps schedule exploratory visits, secures employment and housing, and provides newcomers with grants of up to about \$3,700 for moving expenses.

The majority have come from the United States, South Africa, Argentina and Brazil, Brotman told JNS.

“If one has already made the decision to move abroad, we encourage them to consider helping to grow a smaller Jewish community like ours,” he said. “It is better that they move in partnership with the local Jewish community than move and remain unaffiliated.”

“Our only incentive is to grow our community,” he said.

Inquiries from Israel began to spike in March during protests of Israeli judicial reform, when the Jewish People Policy Institute reported that many Israelis were seriously considering leaving.

On Nov. 29, J Welcome Home Windsor ran one of its latest free virtual workshops to discuss how the program works. An Israeli-born member of the community who has lived in Canada for more than 20 years and a South African relocating the following month to Windsor through the program addressed the online participants.

“The majority, although not all, of the attendees were Israeli, in keeping with the trend that we have been seeing, given the push of both judicial reform and the war,” Brotman told JNS.

After the workshop, the group received many inquiries from Israeli doctors who attended and sought more

information about the long, complex re-licensing process.

Cynicism or irony?

J Welcome Home Windsor invited the same doctors and others to an information session on Dec. 20 to hear from Dr. Zoia Sherman about her journey moving to Canada from Israel more than 30 years ago.

“The people we work with have already made the decision to move abroad, and they contact us because they want more information about life here, or are interested in moving through our program,” Brotman said.

A day after the webinar, he posted on Facebook: “We had the privilege of hosting nearly 50 Israeli doctors for a workshop focused on the intricacies of relocating to Canada.” Those comments spurred a public spat with Paul Hirschson, the Israeli consul general in Montreal.

“Is it cynicism or just irony that while you actively work to weaken Israel’s ability to treat our wounded, the executive director of the Windsor Jewish Federation ‘Stands with Israel’” Hirschson wrote on the Facebook post.

Hirschson discussed his response with JNS.

“Couldn’t he have had the decency to say, ‘We’ll put this on hold for a few months,’” Hirschson said. “The single most sensitive profession – the only profession, doctors and nurses, that Israel has asked for volunteers for. To brag about it. The timing is shameful. It’s how it looks and smells at this time in history.”

Brotman told JNS that he was reporting a fact and that the workshops were marketed, in English, to Jewish physicians and not exclusively to Israeli ones.

“If you are a foreign-trained doctor considering practicing in Canada, I highly recommend watching this session for comprehensive insights and guidance,”

the original posts said, directing readers to the group’s webpage.

The webinars and online posts were “very cynically exploiting the timing of the Oct. 7 massacre,” Hirschson told JNS. The Israeli envoy believes that Montreal’s Jewish Federation “wouldn’t in 1,000 years campaign to convince Israelis to come here” after the crisis.

Brotman denies any such motive but contends that Toronto’s UJA Federation has openly marketed to Israelis in local Jewish media off the heels of Oct. 7.

“I’d be interested to know why Paul decided to pick on me and Windsor, rather than directing his animus” at Toronto, said Brotman.

Vigorously defending Israel

A Boston native, Brotman made aliyah and served in the Israel Defense Forces before moving to South Africa, where he ran a company that connected local entrepreneurs to Israel, often on trips.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, he accepted his current job. He has “defended Israel vigorously since Oct. 7 in the media in Windsor,” he told JNS.

Beyond the social-media post, Hirschson told JNS he questions the perceived optics of Brotman’s new consulting business, which helps new immigrants, believing that he’s “cynically exploiting the timing” of the Oct. 7 attacks to bring in more Israeli clients.

Hirschson thinks it is “taking advantage of Israel’s weakness to advance two projects of his.”

Brotman told JNS that he launched his business, Rootless Mobility, at the beginning of 2023 “with the full permission” of the local Jewish Federation.

He added that his clients range in religious beliefs and country of origin – mostly, Europe, Australia and New Zealand – and that any client looking for specific Jewish assistance is steered to the community’s organization. **HW**

Jewish-Owned Grocery in Toronto Firebombed, Graffitied with ‘Free Palestine’

(JNS) – The International Delicatessen Foods, based in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Toronto and reportedly owned by Jews of Russian origin, experienced a bomb attack, smashed windows and vandalism at approximately 6 a.m. last Wednesday from a yet unknown assailant.

Firefighters put out the flames, and no one at the scene was injured.

“This is this tipping point,” said Pauline Gray, a spokesperson for the Toronto Police Service. “This is a criminal act. It is violent, it is targeted, it is organized.”

She said law enforcement would “leave

no stone unturned” and “use all the resources available to us” in pursuit of prosecuting the perpetrator. Investigators have chosen to approach the case as a hate crime.

While the grocery store carries some Israeli products, it’s not focused on Jewish

or kosher items. Instead, it bills itself as one of the city’s “first European delicatessen grocery stores.”

The initials of the store (IDF) are prominently displayed on the building, potentially misunderstood as a reference to the Israel Defense Forces. **HW**

Verbal Exchange at Utah Jazz Game Misses the Point



Chabad Rabbi Avremi Zippel outside a Utah Jazz basketball game on Jan. 1, 2023. Source: X/Avremi Zippel.

(JNS) – A rabbi says he was asked to put away a sign expressing his Jewish pride at a Utah Jazz game on New Year’s Day after an interaction with player Kyrie Irving, who has a history of antisemitic postings on social media.

In postings on social media, Rabbi Avremi Zippel, who serves as a Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in Salt Lake City,

recounted the events that led to him and those with him being asked to put away their signs. Last Monday night, he, his father and two others were sitting court-side at the Delta Center as the Utah Jazz took on the Dallas Mavericks.

The tickets, Zippel noted, were a gift from a community member who is also a Holocaust survivor.

Among the Mavericks players was point guard Irving, who was suspended in 2022 after posting antisemitic material on social media and failing to condemn antisemitism. At the time, Irving was with the Brooklyn Nets and stated that he had no animus against Jews.

Initially, Zippel said, no one seemed to have an issue with the signs, which said: “I’m a Jew and I’m Proud,” with the letter “o” being replaced by a Star of David. “Arena security was stationed 24 inches from my chair. He said nothing,” Zippel wrote on his Instagram.

According to the rabbi, things changed in the middle of the first quarter when, in the midst of play, Irving, saw the sign and reportedly told Zippel, “‘I’m Jewish, too,’” and showed the rabbi his Star of David tattoo. Zippel said he then wished the basketball star a Happy New

Year, and in response, Irving told him, “Don’t got to bring that to a game.”

Soon afterwards, a security guard approached Zippel’s group and asked to see their tickets. They were asked to put away their signs as they are not allowed courtside.

On his social-media post, Zippel stated that Jazz employees told him that the request for them to take down the signs was made “after Kyrie Irving saw the signs, verbally commented on them to us and complained to Dallas security.”

The Delta Center website states that “hand-held signs and posters” are allowed at most shows and events at the venue “unless specified by team, event and/or arena management.”

Among the rules for signs are a size requirement; they can be no larger than 11×17 inches and “must be related to the show and not contain obscene or offensive language or pictures.”

In a statement, the Utah Jazz said that their “Code of Conduct is in place so that games can be played without distraction and disruption. No matter where someone is in the arena, if a sign becomes distracting or sparks an interaction with a player, we will ask them to remove it.”

“During an out-of-bounds play in the first quarter of [Monday’s] Jazz game against the Dallas Mavericks, there was a group sitting courtside whose signs sparked an interaction with a player that created a distraction and interfered with play of game,” the statement continued. “As the next step in standard security protocol, the fans were asked to take down their signs.”

“The part-time employee who told the fans it was the content of the sign that was the problem was incorrect. The issue was the disruptive interaction caused by usage of the signs, not the content of the signs,” the statement said.

A spokesperson for the basketball team confirmed to JNS that the player in question was Irving, though the decision to have the signs removed was made by Utah Jazz officials.

Late last Tuesday evening, Zippel took to X and responded to the statement, writing in part: “Bottom line: there was one person, in a building of 18,000+, that was triggered by sign that says ‘I’m a Jew and I’m proud.’ Why that bothers him so, to the point that it sparks an interaction, should be the real question anyone is asking.” **HW**

To Welcome Interfaith Couples, this Conservative Synagogue Hired a Cantor Who’s Allowed to Wed Them

By Gavi Klein

(Jewish Journal of Greater Boston via JTA) – Sarah Freudenberger has spent a lot of time being told “no.”

A year and a half out of college, the “no” came from cantorial schools when she applied for ordination. Months later, when she got engaged, it came from the three rabbis she had worked with at a Reform synagogue in Florida, when she asked if they would officiate her wedding.

Both refusals were because – like 42% of married American Jews, according to a 2020 Pew study – Freudenberger’s spouse is not a Jew. Peter, her husband and the father of her three children, is Buddhist.

It took time to find a cantorial program that would allow her to get ordained with a non-Jewish spouse – just as it had taken time before she found a rabbi who would officiate at her interfaith wedding, which took place in 2010.

“It was such a gift to us,” she said. “Looking back, I didn’t realize how much it would have affected me personally, how much regret I would have felt, if I hadn’t had a rabbi at my wedding.”

She added, “I can’t untangle my personal experience from my officiant experience. It is the main reason why I know – firsthand – how much of a blessing it is to be able to do that for people.”

Now, Freudenberger says she is passing on this gift to other Jews like her by offering interfaith wedding officiation as the cantor of Congregation Shirat Hayam in Swampscott, Massachusetts.

She can’t preside over the ceremonies inside Shirat Hayam’s building, because the congregation is part of the Conservative movement of Judaism, which bars its member communities from hosting interfaith wedding ceremonies. But because Freudenberger did not attend a Conservative seminary and is not part of its clergy associations, she is free to officiate the weddings elsewhere.

The arrangement illuminates how a changing rabbinic marketplace is opening doors for interfaith families at

Conservative synagogues, where the movement’s prohibitions around interfaith weddings have imposed barriers to welcoming intermarried couples.

“Intermarriage and the inclusion of intermarried couples and families are among the most important issues the Conservative-Masorti movement is addressing,” said Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, CEO of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly, two leading organizations of the Conservative-Masorti movement. (Masorti is the name of the Conservative movement in Israel/outside of North America.)

“Conservative-Masorti rabbis who are members of the Rabbinical Assembly are not authorized to officiate at interfaith wedding ceremonies,” he said. “But rather than focusing on intermarriage as a ‘threat’ to Jewish survival – as we did in the mid-20th century – today we are instead exploring ways to engage all couples and families with a Jewish partner in the beauty and meaning of Jewish community and practice.”

In recent years, the movement’s standards on intermarriage have shifted. In 2017, Conservative institutions voted to allow non-Jews to become members of synagogues. The following year, it removed a ban on its rabbis attending interfaith weddings.

In 2020, the USCJ hired Keren McGinity as interfaith specialist. She recently produced a handbook on interfaith inclusion that Blumenthal says is a vital step in shifting the status of interfaith families within the movement while holding firm on matters of traditional Jewish law, or halacha, which forbids Jews from marrying non-Jews.

Blumenthal said the movement has established a task force that will recommend further steps for welcoming intermarried couples. He said the task force, composed of clergy and lay leaders, will aim to “balance tradition and modernity within the framework of halacha.”

Shirat Hayam has been striving to find

ways to include and welcome interfaith families in its community for years. In 2018, Rabbi Michael Ragozin founded an Interfaith Task Force to address an issue challenging many in the community at that time – non-Jewish spouses of Jewish congregants could not serve on the board of directors. Ultimately, the congregation voted to extend full membership privileges to non-Jewish spouses.

“A couple of generations back, intermarriage was a different phenomenon. Intermarriage may have been more likely to walk away from Jewish tradition, Jewish community, raising Jewish kids,” said Ragozin. He noted that today, the data says otherwise.

The 2020 Pew survey of American Jews found that Jews married to other Jews are far more likely than intermarried couples to say they are raising their minor children as “Jewish by religion.” But it also found that the adult children of intermarried couples are “increasingly likely” to identify as Jewish – and that two-thirds of intermarried couples today say they are raising their children with a Jewish identity.

As that data was emerging, long-standing patterns in rabbinic hiring were changing rapidly. In recent years, the number of people seeking to attend denominational seminaries, including the ones operated by the Conservative movement, has fallen sharply, creating a gap between the number of synagogues seeking rabbis and cantors and the number of applicants on the job market. Meanwhile, non-traditional, often low-residency programs have grown – including the Aleph Ordination Program where Freudenberger was ordained in 2022.

Aleph is affiliated with the Jewish Renewal movement but its graduates work in all kinds of synagogues. And when Freudenberger emerged as a leading candidate in Shirat Hayam’s cantor search, Ragozin saw an opportunity.

“The lightbulb went off in my head,”

he said. “This is how we’re going to signal to the broader Jewish community that’s on the North Shore, that’s looking at Shirat Hayam for the North Shore – we’re going to signal to intermarried families that this is a place in which you belong.”

Before moving ahead with the plan – for a Renewal-ordained cantor to officiate interfaith weddings for the community – Shirat Hayam leaders checked in with the USCJ. The response they got was that that scenario would not require the synagogue to disaffiliate from the movement, as long as the service wasn’t held on the congregation’s property.

Blumenthal said the new task force is examining cases like Shirat Hayam’s, and putting together a report that will “help us frame important questions like the ones that are raised by the practice in Swampscott.”

During the interview process, the search committee asked Freudenberger if she would be willing to officiate interfaith weddings.

“That sent me a clear message that the synagogue was interested,” she said. “They not only wanted to allow it, but were interested in me doing them for the congregation.”

She was hired in 2021.

“We don’t want to be ‘backroom’ about it,” she said. “We want to be open about it, we want to tell people about it. We want to say, ‘You’re welcome here, you’re welcome with us, we want you to be a part of our community.’”

Since her ordination, Freudenberger has officiated at four weddings – two between Jews, and two interfaith.

“People that are coming looking for a Jewish wedding want a Jewish wedding,” she said. “If their answer is no, what does that tell them about being Jewish? What does that tell them about being Jewish as a family?”

A version of this story originally appeared in the Jewish Journal of Greater Boston and is reprinted with permission. **HW**

Israeli Hostage Killed in December During Attempted Rescue in Gaza

(JNS) – The Israel Defense Forces revealed last Wednesday that Sahar Baruch, whom Hamas terrorists took hostage during their Oct. 7 massacre of 1,200 people in southern Israel, was killed during an attempted rescue operation last month in the Gaza Strip.

The IDF said it has been unable to determine the exact cause of Baruch’s death during the Dec. 8 rescue operation, during which two Israeli soldiers were seriously wounded, according to reports.

Kibbutz Be’eri announced on Dec. 9 that Baruch, 25, a resident of the border community, died in Hamas captivity. It didn’t provide additional details.

“We demand the return of his body as part of any hostage deal. We won’t stop until everyone is home,” kibbutz officials stated at the time.

Ham

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed negotiations to return all hostages, describing indirect talks conducted through Qatari and Egyptian mediators as a “tug of war” with ups and downs. He also assured families of captives that military pressure on Hamas is bearing fruit.

So far, the IDF has succeeded in freeing one hostage, 19-year-old Pvt. Ori Megidish, on Oct. 30, three weeks after Hamas kidnapped her from the Nahal Oz Base. **HW**



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Dozens of Penn Professors Spent the Week in Israel, Following their University President’s Antisemitism Resignation

By Deborah Danan

(JTA) – After Oct. 7, Michael Kahana joined hundreds of his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania in signing an open letter condemning Hamas and expressing support for Israel and its right to self defense. But the psychology professor wanted to do more.

So Kahana sent an email to the 340 signatories on the letter, which came amid scathing criticism of Penn’s response to Hamas’ attack on Israel, and invited them on a trip.

Last week, the 39 Penn professors who took Kahana up on the invitation spent three days traveling in Israel, in the first solidarity visit by faculty members of an Ivy League school since the outbreak of the war on Oct. 7 and the congressional hearing on campus antisemitism that led directly to the resignation of Penn’s president.

Many but not all of the professors on the trip were Jewish, and some were visiting Israel for the first time. During their 66-hour visit, they met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog and families of hostages including Rachel Goldberg, the Israeli-American mother of Hersh Goldberg-Polin who has emerged as a stalwart voice advocating for the more than 130 people still held by Hamas in Gaza. In what has become a new rite of passage for visitors to Israel, they also visited devastated Gaza border communities where they heard accounts from

survivors and first responders, according to a statement released by the mission’s tour operator, Israel Destination.

A significant focus of the mission was meeting with academic colleagues from major Israeli institutions, the statement said, including the Hebrew University, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Tel Aviv University, to allow for “deeper mutual understanding of the challenges posed to academia by war and conflict on one side, and antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiments on the other.” The delegation also met with Penn alumni living in Israel and heard from Israeli officials, including Amir Yaron, the governor of the Bank of Israel who previously was a professor at Penn’s Wharton School of Business, during a banquet at Tel Aviv’s ANU Museum.

“I was truly surprised to see how much our visit meant to our Israeli colleagues and by my own overwhelming emotional response to hearing from Israelis firsthand,” cinema and media studies professor Peter Decherney, who worked with Kahana to organize the trip, said in the statement.

The delegation took place amid a backdrop of tension at Penn, which was already embroiled in an antisemitism controversy surrounding a Palestinian writers conference on campus when Hamas attacked Israel. President Liz

Magill resigned in December shortly after being called to testify before Congress about campus antisemitism – and refraining from saying that calling for the genocide of Jews was a violation of the university’s code of conduct. (Penn’s board president also resigned and has been replaced temporarily by Julie Platt, who also chairs Jewish Federations of North America.)

While the group was in Israel, a second college president who took the same stance during the congressional hearing stepped down. Harvard University’s Claudine Gay also faced allegations of plagiarism that emerged as her critics took aim following the university’s initial response to Hamas’ attack.

Kahana pointed to the global academic community’s failure to express support to Israeli academics after Oct. 7.

“Academic communities are incredibly small, tight-knit families that span the globe,” Kahana said, according to the statement. “When the horrific trauma of October 7 struck the Israeli academic community, people awaited words of comfort from their close colleagues and friends, but for many, those words did not come.”

Kahana and Decherney barely knew each other prior to organizing the trip, even though they have worked on the same campus for years. In fact, many of the Penn professors, from varied

disciplines like statistics, film, and orthopedics, had never met before the mission.

Now, the professors are “returning home with a greater understanding of how the U.S. academic community can support their Israeli colleagues during this traumatic time, and with renewed vigor to withstand the antisemitism and anti-Israel feelings prevalent on campus,” the statement said.

Decherney expressed his hope that the visit would “inspire more university communities to move past divisive cultures and come themselves.”

According to Yair Jablinowitz from Israel Destination, which specializes in educational tourism, since the Penn mission became public, the tour operator has received dozens of inquiries into similar visits from representatives at other universities, including Harvard, Columbia, Yale and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology – many of which are, like Penn, facing federal Department of Education investigations over their handling of antisemitism complaints.

“There is definitely now a drive to go on these types of delegations,” he told JTA. “The Penn delegation had an influence not only on the academic world in Israel and the people of Israel that they met, but also on Ivy League schools throughout North America.” **HW**



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